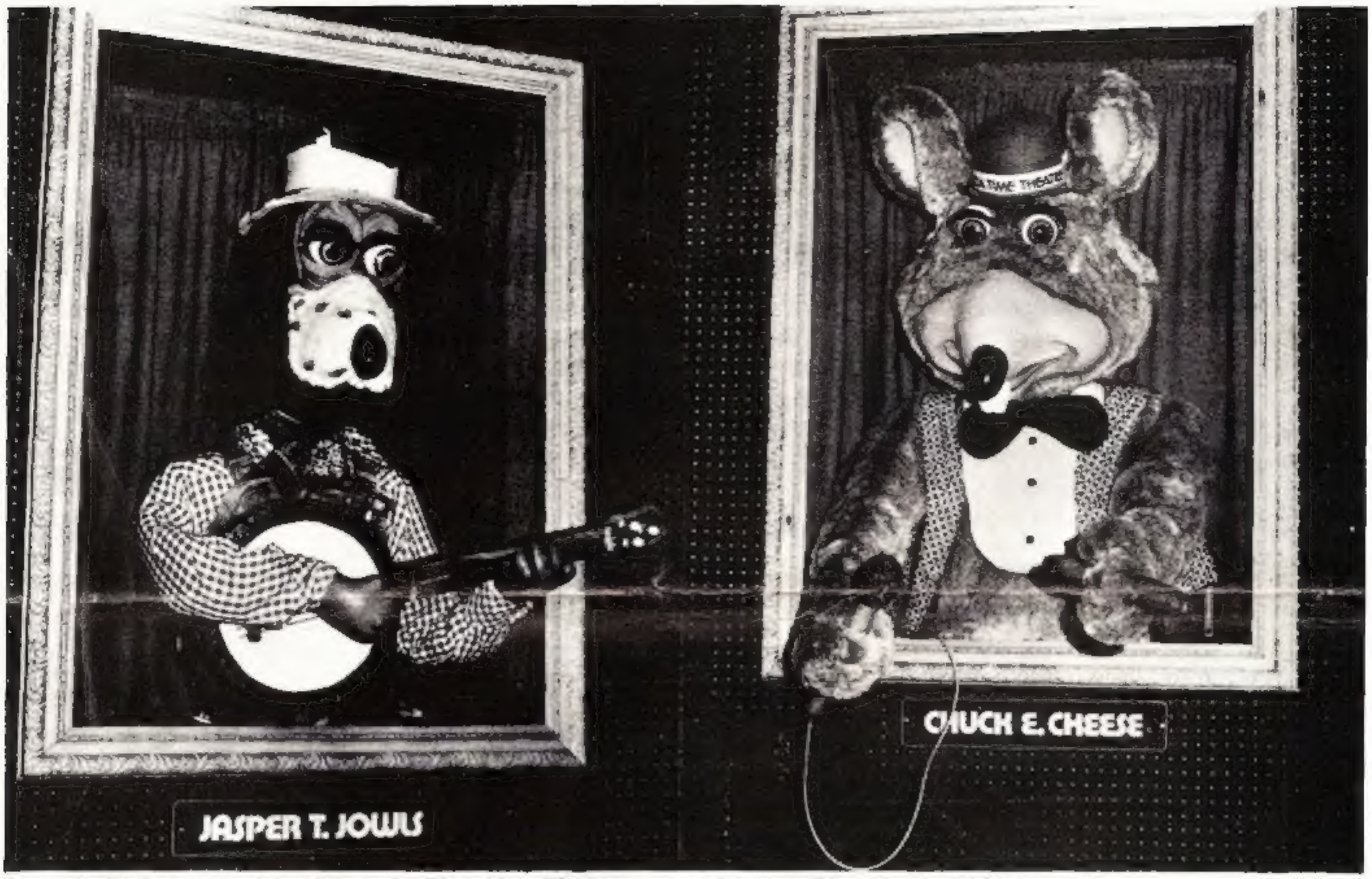

Computerized cartoon characters make Pizza Time Theatre a cross between Disneyland and McDonald's.

Pizza Time's Vaudeville Theatre

"We're in the fun business," enthuses Gene N. Landrum, president of a new family entertainment eatery that's a cross between Disneyland and McDonald's. Called Pizza Time Theatre, the parlor combines quality pizza with coin-operated games and a computerized vaudeville show featuring a chorus of three-dimensional cartoon characters.

Two theatres are open in San Jose and debuts in Concord and Stockton, Calif. are imminent. During the next five years the company hopes to open 1000 more units across the country.

"Pizza Time Theatre is really Disneyland carried to American families in their neighborhoods," says Landrum. Bear Country Jamboree, a Magic Kingdom attraction in which computer-animated, singing bears entertain visitors, was the inspiration for the restaurant concept. "This is something the Disney people should have thought of years ago," notes Landrum.

Rude Emcee. The PTT characters are entirely original, however. Chuck E. Cheese, the show's master of ceremonies, is a street-wise, Jersey-born rat who makes rude comments and interrupts his guests. Jasper T. Jowls is a banjo-strummin' hound who's a bit naive and slow to pick up on Chuck E.'s motor-mouthed insults. Other performers include Mr. Munch, the Purple Pizza Eater and Pasqually, a temperamental Italian chef who calls out birthday greetings. For adults, there's the Dolli Dimples Cabaret, a piano bar hosted by a full-sized animated hippo with a repertoire of 20 medleys.

The animals perform continuously in the dining room at intervals of about eight minutes. Each show lasts one to three minutes, says Landrum, and is fully automatic. The curious can view the master control room through a glass window near the salad bar.

Besides pizza, PTT serves sandwiches, salads, beverages and make-it-yourself ice cream sundaes. Six-ounce servings of ice cream are sold in a bowl and customers add condiments of their choice from a wide selection of nuts, marshmallows and syrups. In areas where it's legal, beer and wine will also be available.

"We're the only fast food chain capable of handling large groups," Landrum points out. That's because each unit will average between eight and 10,000 square feet. Pizza Time ovens are set up to cook 480 to 600 pizzas (depending on size) per hour. And PTT offers party packages for birthdays, anniversaries and other special occasions that include costumed appearances by the cartoon animals, computer-led cheers, sing-alongs and free game tokens.

Happy Birthday. The PTT characters sing three renditions of "Happy Birthday": two for kids and one for adults. Chuck E. leads the animals in a thunderous cheer when triumphant little leaguers and other groups visit the theatre. Flags wave, horns blow and drums beat in accompaniment.

Each restaurant is laid out in three interconnecting rooms: the theatre/dining room, game room and Dolli Dimples Cabaret. Landrum designed this piano-playing hippo to entertain parents, but "we couldn't keep the kids out," he reports. A sign reading, *Especially for Mom and Dad,* was never posted. While parents eat or wait for pizza orders to be filled, kids run around, play games, watch the shows and generally have a ball.

A special free area for small tots has been set aside with a slide, rocker horses and Puppy Pong. A huge,

simulated piece of Swiss cheese is a huge fun event. Kids crawl around inside and shoot out a slide at the end. There are round peep holes they can peer through at parents, or have their picture taken.

"In our Fantasy Forest Game Preserve we have more than 100 of the latest video, pinball and arcade games," says Landrum. Tokens are given as premiums with individual food orders or may be purchased five-for-a-dollar from a dispenser. Quarters may also be used for play.

PTT's expansion plans are ambitious, Landrum admits. How will the company finance this growth explosion? "There are many alternatives we'll consider," says Landrum. Franchising is one route and PTT is in the process now of negotiating several contracts.

Freeway Access. As for site locations, Landrum is looking at spots adjacent or nearby regional shopping centers. "We don't need a prime corner to attract the impulse buyer," he says. But the company's research shows customers travel a median distance of 10 miles to San Jose units, so good freeway and other arterial access is important. Shopping center developers spend fortunes to locate at just such crossroads. In early February, Landrum was scouting sites in the Greater Los Angeles area. He hopes to have a Pizza Time Theatre open there this summer.

To start mass-producing the computer cartoon characters, in fact, the company recently moved into spacious new quarters in Cupertino, Calif., where the corporate headquarters, franchise development and manufacturing activities are all under one roof. For the two San Jose theatres, two Chuck E. Cheeses and two sets of all the other characters were handbuilt — a $1,500,000 development effort using sophisticated computer hard and software. "We've made some minor mechanical changes and now we're ready to mass produce," says Landrum.

Although Landrum's background is primarily in electronics, after three years with Pizza Time Theatre he's gotten a solid education in foodservice. Landrum's also hired managers at the unit and regional level with industry experience, including many previously with Saga Corporation. "We are actively seeking people to join us in the areas of personnel, purchasing, training and management," he adds.

The concept for Pizza Time Theatre was the brainchild of Nolan K. Bushnell, a pioneer in video games and now PTT chairman. Other officers include Donald K. Marks, director of franchising; Michael M. Hatcher, director of entertainment; Gregory J. Tilden, director of technical operations; Raymond W. Davis, director of engineering; and John Impson, director of manufacturing.

Dolli Dimples' piano bar.

PIZZA TIME'S VAUDEVILLE THEATRE

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